

Sasse, Todd Young, Kamala D. Harris, Bill Nelson, Johnny Isakson, Edward J. Markey, Mike Lee, Debbie Stabenow, Sheldon Whitehouse, Robert Menendez, Tim Kaine.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Over 60 Senators in the U.S. Senate—the majority of Republicans and the majority of Democrats—sent this letter to who was then leadership of the Senate, writing, in essence: Don't change the legislative filibuster.

A bunch of Democrats and a bunch of Republicans—I was going to read the names, but they know who they are—the majority on both sides in this body, from both parties, in 2017 said: Don't change it. This shouldn't be something the U.S. Senate changes.

Part of the reason this was going on was that, at the time, then-President Trump was pressing Senators, particularly Majority Leader McConnell, to change the filibuster. The filibuster requires 60 votes to move legislation in the Senate. It requires compromise. It requires bipartisanship. It is what makes us different from the House. At the time, then-Republican President Trump was saying: Change it. I want legislation to move more quickly.

The Republicans and then-Majority Leader McConnell said that it was not a good idea. As a matter of fact, most of us said that it was not a good idea, so we didn't do anything. We didn't change it because we didn't want to change the nature of the U.S. Senate.

This is one of the issues being discussed right now, but it shouldn't be a difficult issue because, as I said, the vast majority of Senators in this body, a couple of years ago, said: Don't do it. We don't want the Senate to just become a smaller version of the House, because that is what would happen if you were to get rid of the legislative filibuster.

I do want to extend my congratulations to the new majority leader as of yesterday, Senator Schumer, but to the new majority leader: This should not be a difficult issue. This should not be something that we are having a problem with in terms of the negotiations between the Democrats and the Republicans that delays the power-sharing agreement. This should be a piece of cake. Just a couple of years ago, the vast majority of Democrats and Republicans said: Don't change the legislative filibuster. We want to make sure that remains the case.

I think, for the new majority leader, this would be an act of statesmanship, an act of compromise, and would certainly make the statement that he is going to keep the Senate the same as it has been for decades, for centuries. Changing the legislative filibuster would change the entire structure, history, and precedent of this very important body in our country, so it shouldn't be hard. The vast majority of the Democrats and Republicans has already agreed to this.

To our new majority leader: Do what you know is right—an act of statesmanship and compromise. We have all

been talking about it. It should not be a difficult decision, particularly given that so many Senators on both sides of the aisle feel strongly enough to have written Senator Schumer and Senator McConnell just a couple of years ago on this.

To all of my colleagues who signed that letter—you know who you are—make sure you are pressing the new majority leader to stick to what you pressed him on just a couple of years ago. It is important.

NOMINATION OF LLOYD JAMES AUSTIN

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, I also want to talk about another important issue, and that is President Biden's nomination for the very important job of Secretary of Defense, Mr. Lloyd Austin. We are going to be voting on his nomination here on the Senate floor in a couple of hours.

I had the honor of introducing Mr. Austin just 2 days ago at his confirmation hearing, and I thought the confirmation hearing went well. So I want to talk a little bit about Mr. Austin before we take what will essentially be two important votes for his confirmation.

Now, the last time I was actually on the floor of the U.S. Senate, our Capitol was under siege, and from a foreign policy and national security perspective, America's authoritarian rivals have been gloating over what happened on that day. They have been reveling in our disunity. Democracy brings chaos, they tell their people. It is better to have a strong hand that keeps order. Well, as you know, we do live in an imperfect democracy, no doubt, and the American I was honored to introduce at the Armed Services hearing the other day, Mr. Lloyd Austin, understands our imperfections more than many.

Yet, on closer inspection, the world's dictators have little to celebrate. Congress went back to work on January 6, right here on the Senate floor, to count electoral votes, and yesterday there was a peaceful transfer of power at the top of our government, as there has been since our Republic's founding.

At some point—maybe sooner than we think—Chinese and Russian citizens are going to ask: Hey, why can't we do that? Why don't we have strong, resilient institutions that ensure the regular elections of new leaders and that invest in self-government and the people?

When these citizens ask these questions of authoritarians like Putin or Xi Jinping, they are not going to be gloating anymore because they won't have answers to these questions.

So what does this all have to do with Mr. Lloyd Austin? A lot. Mr. Austin has been nominated to lead one of America's most trusted institutions—the Department of Defense. Many of us have worked hard over the last few years to rebuild our military's strength

and readiness, but I think we can all agree that there has been too much turmoil at the top at the Pentagon. As its civilian leader, I am confident that Mr. Austin will bring steadiness, leadership, and respect to this indispensable American institution.

I got to know Mr. Austin in 2005 and 2006 while serving together in an Army-heavy combatant command as we conducted combat operations throughout the Middle East. We had what might be referred to today as an unequal power relationship. He was a two-star general. I was a major. He had spent years on Active Duty. I was a reservist. He was a soldier. I was a marine. I was just one of hundreds of field-grade infantry officers who had been recalled to Active Duty and deployed in the region during a challenging time for our Nation. Yet, when I asked for his time, Mr. Austin gave it. When I had a problem, he listened. When I asked for help on an important mission, he provided it.

A critical hallmark of exceptional leadership, especially for organizations like the Pentagon, is not just how one treats superiors but how one treats subordinates, those down the chain of command. What I saw was respect and integrity and someone who knew how to get things done in a difficult environment.

It is clear to me the core principles of Mr. Austin's life have been duty, honor, country. West Point has done its job. Now, that may sound quaint to some, but I think having individuals of impeccable character at the top of our government is more important than ever. Other than integrity, there is no singular requirement for the difficult job of Secretary of Defense, and as the former Director of the Joint Staff and as the former CENTCOM Commander, Mr. Austin certainly has insight on critical issues, such as interagency budget battles, working with allies, and congressional oversight.

Mr. Austin is also fully committed to the constitutional principle of civilian control of our military—something that those who serve in uniform typically understand and revere more than those who don't. In that regard, you may recall that, about 10 days ago, we had a hearing in the Committee on Armed Services on this very important topic, but I actually thought some of the witnesses had rather simplistic views of this important issue.

They had brought up topics and discussions of so-called "military logic" by those who wear the uniform versus "political logic" for those who don't wear the uniform.

So let me play devil's advocate for those who participated and watched that hearing.

The very nature of the confirmation hearing that we had with Mr. Austin just 2 days ago and, indeed, the very nature of the transfer of power that we saw yesterday here at the Capitol are evidence, in my view, that the civilian control of the military is not at risk in

America. I actually believe the related but opposite problem should be of more concern today, at this moment, and that problem is no military experience in the top ranks of our government. With the exception of Mr. Austin, no nominee on the incoming Biden administration's national security team has ever served in uniform. With regard to the entire Biden Cabinet, only one other nominee has any military experience at all. This is not wise.

If confirmed, I am sure I won't agree with all of Mr. Austin's decisions, but when the inevitable budget battles occur, it will be critical for our Nation's security and, very importantly, the military members and their families who serve to have a Secretary of Defense who understands firsthand the very real morale and readiness problems that result from drastic cuts to our military—something, unfortunately, I think many of my colleagues here in the Senate will be pushing for and even members of the Biden administration will be pushing for.

So let me conclude with this. Right now, a number of us are interviewing Cabinet members for confirmation for the incoming Biden administration. I anticipate opposing some, supporting others. Certainly, I anticipate opposing some if I believe they will hurt the working families of my State. But with regard to Mr. Austin, I am fully supporting his nomination.

We are living through difficult times—a pandemic, racial tensions, riots, turmoil at the top of the Pentagon, and rising dangers from China, Russia, and Iran. Mr. Austin's confirmation won't solve all of these problems, but it will help.

He represents the best of America—a man of integrity, humility, and character, with a wealth of relevant experience. Our allies will take comfort in his confirmation, and our adversaries will take pause. And as America's first African-American Secretary of Defense, he will be an inspiration to millions both in and out of uniform.

For all of these reasons, I strongly urge my colleagues to support Mr. Austin's confirmation and the waiver in Federal law that it requires.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

HONORING THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL POLICE

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I can say with certainty that General Austin has no better friend or ally in this Chamber than Senator DAN SUL-LIVAN, who has seen him as a person and seen him as a commander.

Those votes will occur later today.

Madam President, I rise today on the floor to talk about what happened yesterday at the Capitol and what happened 2 weeks ago at the Capitol.

Yesterday, we had the 59th Presidential inauguration right here. The citadel of democracy was once again

the place where a President and Vice President were sworn in for 4 years.

Starting in 1789, every 4 years, America and the world have witnessed this remarkable event that provides for the peaceful transfer of Executive power and the continuity of government—something we sometimes take for granted but is rare, even today. It has happened through wars. It has happened through economic recessions. We have had our inaugurations today and during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

What is more, the inauguration took place 2 weeks to the day on the very west steps of the United States Capitol where a violent mob stormed this building, desecrating these halls, and tried to stop our constitutionally mandated deliberations in this body.

It was the ninth inauguration ceremony I have attended. I was proud to be there as President Biden and Vice President HARRIS were sworn in.

I am here on the floor today to thank the Capitol Police and other law enforcement agencies, including the Secret Service and its Director, Jim Murray, who took the lead on this national special security event to ensure that things went smoothly and that we, indeed, had a peaceful transfer of power.

I also want to give special thanks to the men and women of the National Guard, who worked to ensure this ceremony was safe and secure. Over the past 2 weeks, 25,000 National Guard troops from across the country, including all 50 States and 3 territories, answered the call, leaving their families and friends and, for most, leaving their regular jobs to help defend this sacred celebration of democracy that occurred at this place yesterday.

This number of 25,000 troops includes nearly 1,000 guardsmen from my home State of Ohio. I had the opportunity to meet with a couple hundred of these citizen soldiers from Ohio yesterday. I was able to tell them how much we appreciate their commitment to the mission and what they have done, truly, to protect democracy and to help our Capitol Police during a stressful time. Because of their efforts, the ceremony was safe for everyone in attendance, and we were able to proceed with this transfer of power.

When I thanked them, they all told me the same thing—they were just doing their duty. They were proud to be here. They were protecting their country and their fellow citizens.

I have seen this firsthand over the years when I have visited Ohio National Guard installations around our State, including the Mansfield Air Base, the Toledo Air Base, the Springfield Air Base, Rickenbacker Air National Guard.

During this pandemic, when more Americans than ever are facing severe food insecurity, I have had the chance to hand out food with members of the Ohio Army National Guard who have been working around the clock at food banks I have been at, like Greater

Cleveland Food Bank or Central Ohio Food Bank. They are working hard alongside volunteers to respond to a true crisis.

But that is not all. The Ohio National Guard has played an essential role in providing critical assistance to our prisons and our jails when guards were out with the COVID virus. They have helped with testing. They have helped to get the COVID-19 vaccines distributed across our State, and they are continuing to do that. We can't thank them enough for what they have done during this time of crisis.

As I have visited with the Guard this week, both with regard to the Ohio members and Guard from all over the country, including some conversations I had this morning, I have told them all what I have heard from the Capitol Police this week. I have heard that they really appreciated the backup at a time when shifts have been long, sleep has been rare, and the effects of the attack on the Capitol are still acutely felt.

It has been a tough 2 weeks on our Capitol police officers. It has been a tough 2 weeks since the attack on the Capitol.

I want to take this opportunity to also express the gratitude of all of us in this Chamber and all Americans to the Capitol Police for bravely holding the line against an illegal, violent mob that threatened this building, our proceedings, and our colleagues.

In effect, the men and women of the Capitol Police Force put their lives on the line to defend democracy. It is that simple.

As I said on this floor that terrible night 2 weeks ago, it was because of their courage that we were safe and because of their courage that we were able to demonstrate to the American people and the world that we were going to accomplish our constitutional duty of certifying the election. They allowed us to do that.

As a Congress, we have begun a complete, impartial, and nonpartisan investigation into what went wrong that day. I am working across the Senate with the committees of jurisdiction—the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, where I will be the ranking Republican, the Rules Committee, the Appropriations Committee, and the Intelligence Committee to ensure that our Capitol Police are never put in that kind of position again. We are performing oversight to ensure they have what they need to be able to protect the Capitol going forward.

Without prejudging our investigation, we must consider what reforms need to be made and take a hard look at the physical security of our Capitol Complex. While these buildings must remain accessible to the people, we need to look at incorporating the best practices in physical security, to include shatterproof windows and doors that can't be easily breached. This will